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In Response Sports and Jesuit Universities

James L. Sankovitz

Issue #21 of Conversations (on sports in Jesuit universities) misses the mark by not considering the different publics that intercollegiate athletics serve.

I regularly read *Conversations* carefully, but the last issue attracted unusual attention. "Sports and Jesuit Universities" was a very noble try, but only a near miss! The contributors were substantial in their respective contributions but mostly self-serving, at best.

There is no easy way to describe intercollegiate athletic problems, let alone suggest corrective action. Division One NCAA aspirations versus Division Three is akin to professional sports' "large market" versus "small market." "Spirituality" as an answer is nice, has some potential, but in the long run just doesn't work.

Some of my specific reactions (not in order and certainly not in graded importance with many of the excellent points made in the various contributions to the series of articles) include:

1. Jesuit campuses (and others) send strong signals when coaches are paid much more handsomely than faculty. The 1999-2000 IRS Form 990 reports disclose that five Jesuit campuses included various coaches as among their highest paid employees, with upwards of \$500,000 of income, not counting separate contracts for Radio/TV, summer camps and shoe contracts. Not one of the contributors to the *Conversations* essays mentioned that.

2. BC [Boston College] properly counts ice hockey as among its valued Division I sports. That's a territorial sway. Folks in the South would claim that volleyball, with its native habitat familiarity, is just as important. The same could be said of other sports. Such disparities just get in the way of reasonable debate over what to do about basic problems.

3. Club sports throughout was given short shrift. Yet, therein is the most fertile ground for applying the spirituality concept, as well as the notion of athletics as

a way of improving physical shape.

4. The thread of athletic competition throughout fell short. To ignore the even larger transformation of "amateur" sports through the professional phase (let alone the consequences of similar change in the conduct of Olympic competition) is a head-in-the-sand approach. There is fundamentally no difference between the transformation of Olympic competition as between individuals to nation versus nation as there is Division One NCAA versus Division Three. Is BC a more substantial campus because it has a football team AND a law school than Georgetown, with basketball and a medical school?

5. To ignore the fundamental monetary mindset athletic directors have taken towards Title IX is tragic. It's easy to explain. It's not unlike the glass half-full half-empty. Campuses drop male sports teams in order to achieve parity with women's teams. The alternative of expanding women's teams to achieve proportionality is dismissed too easily because of revenue-generation reasons.

6. Murray Sperber has been a lone voice in the desert crying "shame" for many more years than simply those attributed to his anti-Bobby Knight passages. Jesuit Bill Neenan should at least get his reference to Sperber's campus correct.

7. Does athletic success equate with alumni attachment? There are far too many instances of the reverse to even consider this as a major contributing factor. After Marquette won the 1977 NCAA basketball championship, alumni contributions actually DECREASED.

8. Fr. Neenan's references to students moving away from home to embrace the excitement of athletic

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victories on campus does violent disservice to families who elect to have children attend local campuses. But, maybe BC doesn't know better! (After reading his text, I tend to agree with the unnamed panelist who gently suggested Neenan's was a "macho, sexist and tribal" contribution).

9. Former ACE president Bob Atwell may take an extreme viewpoint (blame it on his previous experience as a vice president at the University of Wisconsin!), but I have long thought that he was simply trying to motivate other academic leaders to understand just how serious the economic/professionalism mess has become in intercollegiate athletics.

10. We at Marquette have been spoiled. We have had the benefit of a few sports people who have allowed reality to influence athletic-related decision-making. Bill Chandler comes to mind. So does Jack Nagle, as does Frank Murray. More recently, we can recount the Al McGuire impact. (a) What other collegiate coach being lured to the pros claimed he would go only if he was paid one dollar more than the highest player? (b) What other collegiate coach was held to his contract in the fashion that Ray McAuley held Al? (and could become an example for other places).

11. There is no doubt that this entire topic is worthy of some serious deliberation, including that which includes Jesuit spirituality and Jesuit campus budgets. But we shouldn't forget some of the many more basic notions that guide our attitudes. Again, I'll call upon Al McGuire for a comment that cuts to the chase. "I just don't understand. I've got a seventeen year old kid wearing underwear at the free throw line and the crowd is yelling profanities at him. If it was golf, everyone would want silence and concentration."

Go figure, as the current idiom states.

I do not demean the issue's efforts. It's an important topic. The major problem is that important segments of the many involved publics have carved out isolated remedies that have little realistic chance of success.

Thank you and best wishes on future issues.



Photo Courtesy of Loyola College of Maryland

Carlos Irizarry, a junior education major with a 3.9 grade point average at Loyola University Chicago, knew at a young age that he wanted to become a teacher. "When I was eight, I told my teacher, 'One day, I'm going to have your job!'" says Carlos, who grew up in Chicago's Pilsen neighborhood and attended Catholic schools. "I love to learn. My parents always said that an education is key to anything you want to do in life."

At Holy Trinity High School, a music teacher recognized Carlos' exceptional academic abilities and steered him into writing and poetry to nurture his critical thinking skills. Carlos' depth of thinking has also impressed his professors at Loyola. "He has a level of understanding complex issues that is unusual for his age," says Dr. Anna Lowe, a professor in Loyola's Teachers for the 21st Century program. "Consequently, he tends to view things more from a global perspective. He understands how something that occurs in his neighborhood relates to something occurring on the other side of the world."

This spring, while assisting in an eighth grade language arts classroom for clinical experience, Carlos impressed the classroom teacher with his professionalism, initiative and ability to bring thought-provoking matters to the table. She immediately asked him to help lead a Great Books project.

Carlos would be thrilled to return to Pilsen to teach some day. "Pilsen has gang and drug problems. Many children there get trapped in that. I want to go back and teach children so they, hopefully, will be inspired to do the best they can."